

# Child Safety Seats

*(Part 1: For children weighing 5 to 40 pounds)*

## Why should I use a safety seat?

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and serious injury for children over 1 year old. A safety seat can save your child's life when it is used correctly.
- Holding your child in your arms is not safe. In a crash at 30 mph, a 10-pound baby would be ripped from your arms with a force of 300 pounds. No one is strong enough to hold onto a child in a crash. The child could be smashed into the dashboard and crushed by your weight or injured by an airbag.
- Texas law states that all children must ride in a safety seat until their fifth birthday or until they are 36 inches tall. All children younger than 17 years must ride buckled up. Everyone in the front seat, regardless of age, must be buckled up, too. What is safest, which may be different from what the law says, is described below.

## When should I use a safety seat?

- Always use a child safety seat.
- Insist that everyone buckles up before the car starts moving. Injuries happen in driveways and parking lots, too. Children learn what they see. If you buckle up, they are more likely to follow your example.
- Do not make the deadly mistake of using a safety seat only on freeways or long trips. Many crashes happen at low speeds or within 5 miles of home.
- If your child rides with friends, family members or babysitters, make sure they have a safety seat. Make sure it is installed properly and used every time your child is in the car.

## What kind of safety seat should I use?

<i>Age</i>	<i>Size child</i>	<i>Type of Seat</i>
0 – 1 yr.	5 – 20 lbs.	Infant seat (Rear-facing)
0 – 1 yr.	21 – 30 lbs.	Convertible (Rear-facing)
1 + yrs.	21 – 40 lbs.	Convertible (Forward)
	30 – 40 lbs.	Booster with harness
	Less than 4'9"	Booster without harness
	Taller than 4'9"	Lap/shoulder seatbelt

## Should I use a pre-owned safety seat?

Check the labels for the model numbers and when the seat was made. Recalled seats are listed on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Web page at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov).

- Do not use a safety seat without these labels or if you are unsure if it has been in a crash – even a minor one. It is best to replace a seat that has been in a crash.
- Heat weakens plastic. Do not use a safety seat that is more than five to six years old.

## Airbags and safety seats don't mix

Never put a rear-facing safety seat in the front seat of a car with an airbag. If you have a fender-bender, the airbag could go off and kill your baby. Even without an airbag, a child is still safer in the back seat.



*Install safety seats in the back seat.*

## Rear-facing infant seats

Use a rear-facing infant seat for children weighing less than 20 pounds.

### Correct – Well-connected

- Harness clip is correctly positioned at the child's mid-chest or armpit level. This keeps the shoulder straps in the correct position.
- Harness straps are snug and straight.
- In rear-facing seats, harness straps should come through slots at, or slightly below, the child's shoulders.
- Only use rolled-up towels or a halo that comes with the seat to support a baby's head.
- Most seats require the handle to be down when the infant seat is installed in the car.



Always check your safety seat's instruction manual, as details vary.

### Correct – At 45 degree angle

Used with a detachable base, most rear-facing infant seats should recline at about a 45-degree angle.



### Wrong – Too upright

An infant seat sitting too upright can cause a baby's head to drop forward, cutting off the airway.



### Wrong – Outgrown seat

- Never try to use an infant seat facing forward. It is not designed to be used this way.
- This seat is too small for the child. His head is at the top of the seat. Instead, use a convertible seat that can be used rear-facing to 30 to 35 pounds. Babies must ride rear-facing until at least 1 year of age **and** at least 20 pounds. Riding rear-facing is the safest for young children.
- Harness clip is positioned too low. It should be at armpit level.



### Wrong – Twisted straps

- Twisted, loose harness straps will not hold the child securely.
- Harness clip is not fastened.

### Wrong – Must face rear

- Rear-facing infant seat is incorrectly placed in a forward-facing position.
- Seatbelt system is loose and placed through the incorrect belt path.
- Harness straps are loose.
- For most child seats, the handle should be down. Do not put toys on the handle.



## Rear-facing convertible seats

Use a convertible seat for children who weigh less than 40 pounds. Look for one with a five-point harness that works rear-facing for children 30 to 35 pounds. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children stay rear-facing as long as the safety seat will allow. (Check the labels.)

### **Correct – Use the slots at or below the shoulders**

- Harness straps on rear-facing seats should go through the slots at, or slightly below, the child's shoulders.
- Harness clip is in the correct position – at the armpit level.
- Harness straps are snug and straight. Adjust harness straps so they lie in a straight line. You should not be able to pinch any slack.



### **Correct – Angle is about 45 degrees**

- The safety seat is reclined at about a 45-degree angle. Older babies may tolerate a more upright seat.
- Harness straps and harness clip are correctly positioned on the child's body.
- The safety seat is secured using the correct belt path.



### **Wrong – Seat is too large**

This infant is much too small for this convertible seat. Her head is in front of the shield. Car seats with a five-point harness are better for small children.



### **Wrong – Wrong seat belt path**

Seat belt system is placed through the belt path for the rear-facing position. The labels should show where to put the seat belt.



### **Wrong – Loose straps**

- Harness straps are loose and twisted and don't come through the slots at or below the infant's shoulders.
- The harness clip is positioned too low. It should be at armpit level.

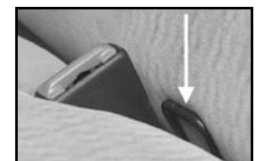


## Forward-facing convertible seats

If your child is 1 year old and weighs at least 20 pounds, you may turn the seat to face forward.

### **Correct – Slots above shoulders**

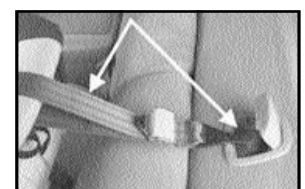
- Harness straps on forward-facing restraints should come through the slots at, or slightly above, the child's shoulders. Some seats require the top slots be used.
- Harness straps are snug and straight. You should not be able to pinch any material.
- Harness chest clip is positioned at the child's armpit level.



Lower anchor

## LATCH

New convertible seats come with lower anchors and a top tether (LATCH). Use either the lower anchors or the seatbelt to install the car seat – whichever gives a tighter fit.



Top tether



## **Wrong – Keep infants rear-facing**

- This baby is too young to be forward-facing.
- Harness straps are loose.
- Chest clip is too low and not connected.
- Seat belt system is placed through the wrong belt path.



## **Wrong – Loose straps**

- Harness straps are loose and twisted.
- Harness chest clip is too low and is not connected.



## **The next step**

Once the middle of the child's ears reaches the top of the car seat or he or she exceeds the weight limit of the seat (usually 40 pounds), your child should ride in a booster seat. Booster seats lower the risk of injury by 59 percent.

- Use a high-back booster with a harness until the child weighs 40 pounds.
- After 40 pounds, remove the harness straps. Use it with a lap/shoulder seat belt until the child is about 4' 9" tall.
- Ask your child's doctor for the fact sheet *Booster Seats*.



## **Installing the seat**

- The first place to try to put a safety seat is in the middle of the back seat. If the back seat has a hump or if the seat belts are close together, put the safety seat behind the passenger seat. With two children, you might put the youngest behind the passenger and the next youngest behind the driver.
- The key to getting a tight fit is to put all your weight (knee) into the seat as you tighten the seat belt or latch. A safety seat should not move more than an inch from side-to-side or from front-to-back when you pull the seat at the belt paths.
- Some seat belts "switch" from free-flow for adult use to a lock mode for use with safety seats. When you secure the safety seat, first thread the seat belt through the belt path and buckle it. Then, pull the seat belt all the way out to switch to the lock mode and feed the excess back into the retractor as you pull the seat belt tight. If the seat belt does not lock, you may need to use a locking clip. Place it within an inch of the seat belt buckle.
- Always consult the owner's manuals for the seat and for your car.



*Based on information from NHTSA.*



Texas Children's Center for Childhood Injury Prevention is the lead organization for SAFE KIDS Greater Houston. A list of checkup events and Inspection Stations is on our Web site, [www.texaschildrenshospital.org/InjuryPrevention](http://www.texaschildrenshospital.org/InjuryPrevention).



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